

A young woman with dark, curly hair is shown from the chest up, holding a white mug with both hands. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful or contemplative expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting. The overall mood is calm and reflective.

Taking Charge of Your Depression



Take charge of your health.
Learn as much as you can.
It's one of the most
important things you
can do for yourself.

Take Charge

Depression is more than just feeling “down” or “blue” for a few days. It is a serious illness that can get in the way of daily life. It doesn’t go away by itself.

But, the good news is that it can be treated. With help, you can feel better.

Welcome to Taking Charge of Your Depression. If you have depression, you aren’t alone. More than 20 million people in the United States suffer from depression.¹

You may have many questions about depression:

- What are the signs of depression?
- How does it affect the body?
- How is it treated?
- What can I do if I am depressed?
- Where can I find help?

Don’t let these questions worry you. This guide can help you learn about depression. And, that will help you take charge of your health.

Also, be sure to talk to someone in your life—family, a friend, your doctor, a religious leader. They can often help you take charge of your depression as well.

What are the signs of depression?

Everyone is different. That means their depression can be different, too. But, there are some common signs.

Most people with depression have one or more of these signs:

- Feel sad, very down, or even angry
- Sleep much more or much less
- Changes in weight and how hungry you get
- Always tired, much less energy than usual
- Don't enjoy the things you used to enjoy
- Hard to think, remember things and make decisions
- Feel guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Don't take care of your health or how you look
- Have aches and pains that don't seem to have a cause
- Are thinking about hurting yourself or someone else (see note)

Do you have any of these signs of depression? If so, see your doctor. Don't be shy about talking about these signs. Depression can be treated.

Are you already getting help for depression? Have your signs gotten better? Be sure to let your doctor know how you're doing. He or she can make changes to your treatment, if needed.

READ THIS NOTE:

**Do you think about killing yourself?
Do you think about hurting yourself
or someone else? If so, call 911.
Or, get emergency help right away!**

**This free hotline can help, too.
Call the National Hopeline Network
at 800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433).**

Depression Affects Your Body, Too

You may think of depression as something that just makes you feel sad. But, it does more than affect your mood. It can affect your body in many ways.

Depression can:

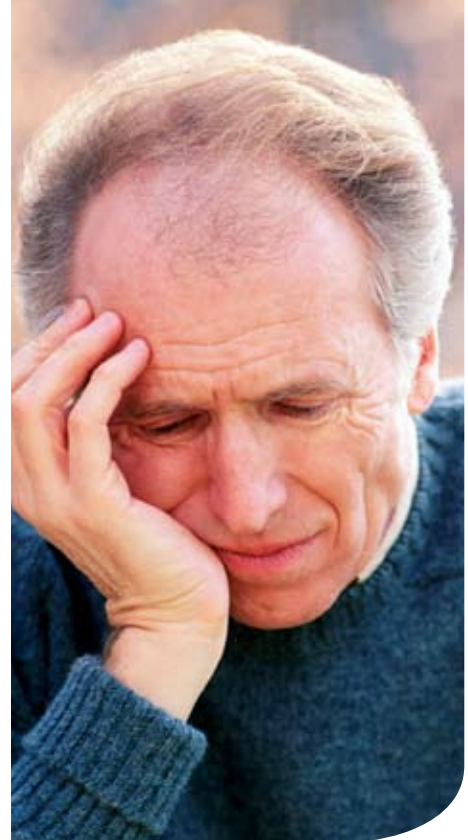
- Make your heart race or pound
- Cause you to feel nervous and jumpy
- Make it easier for you to get sick
- Cause headaches, stomach problems, and pain
- Decrease your energy

The health of our bodies is closely tied to the health of our brains.

Here are two good examples:

- People with medical problems can become depressed. They may be worried and sad about their health condition.
- On the other hand, people with depression can develop other medical problems. That's because they may stop taking care of their health.

Do either of these sound like you? If so, seek help. It can make a difference.



There Is Help—and Hope

When you're depressed, you may feel too down or tired to even think about treatment. But, you must remember that your depression can get better.

Finding the right plan.

Everyone's depression is different. So, treatment plans can be different, too. Your doctor, or other health professional, will want to find what works best for you. Sometimes, the first plan may not work. So, your plan will be changed a bit. It may take a few tries to get it just right. Don't give up. Keep thinking about the day when you'll soon feel better.

The treatments.

Medicine and counseling are the main treatments. Exercise also can be used for depression. Sometimes these treatments are used alone. Sometimes, they're used together.

Medicine—antidepressants.

These are the most common medicines for depression. Each type works a little differently. But, they have the same goal. They help balance the brain's chemicals.

It takes these medicines time to work. Sometimes it takes many weeks. For many people these medicines really help. At times, you may need more help than just medicine.



Counseling—talk with a trained professional.

This is sometimes called “talk therapy.” It can help you better understand your feelings. In time, it will help you change how you think about your worries. A counselor can teach you how to deal with problems. He or she can be there for you when you need someone to talk with. As you begin to feel better, life won’t feel so hopeless.

Like medicine, it takes time to work. It may be several weeks before you feel it working.

Exercise—stay active.

There are many studies about exercise. They show that if you exercise, you’re less likely to suffer from mental health problems. Or, if you have depression, it may help improve your mood. Be sure to ask your doctor if it’s OK to start exercising.

Which is right for you? Your doctor, or other health professional, can help you find the treatment that can help.

Read this **MEDICINE SAFETY** note! It’s very dangerous to make any changes to your medicines if your doctor doesn’t know about it.

Don’t change the amount you take. Don’t stop taking them. Talk to your doctor first. Only make changes when he or she tells you to.

Have more than one doctor? Many people do. Be sure each of your doctors knows about all the medicines you take. That can help keep you safe.

Kids Corner

Depression in Children—What Are the Signs?

In some ways, the signs of depression in children can be the same as they are in adults. But, there are important differences.

It can be easy to miss these signs. Don't mistake them for normal "mood swings." These can be signs of depression. This is especially true if a child has more than one sign.

Younger children may:

- Cling to a parent
- Have a lot of aches and pains that don't seem to have a cause
- Have problems in school
- Be sad most of the time
- Be crabby even when not tired
- Worry too much

Older children may:

- Fight with their parents
- Avoid family and friends
- Become negative or aggressive
- Think and move slower than usual
- Have trouble sleeping
- Start using drugs or alcohol



Helping Your Child

Does your child have signs of depression? Or, has your child been diagnosed with depression? You really can help your child. Be supportive and understanding.

Most of all, be loving. Remember, your child has done nothing wrong. He or she has not caused the depression. And, like other illnesses, it can be treated.

These tips can help:

- Work closely with a doctor or other health professional. Together you can make a treatment plan.
- Be sure your child takes his or her medicine, if the doctor orders. Report all side effects.
- Be aware. Is your child getting better? Getting worse? Let your doctor know.
- Talk with your child a lot. Let him or her know you are there.
- Be patient. Your child may say things he or she doesn't really mean.
- Work with your child's school. Teachers and counselors can often help.

Your child's depression touches the whole family. Talk together. Try to take good care of yourselves. And, be sure to tell your doctor if you need more support.

Getting Help for Depression

What kind of professional should I see?

These are health professionals who can help with depression. Remember, you need to work as a team. Talk openly. Listen carefully. And, ask questions.

Primary care, or family, doctor. You see this doctor for all types of health concerns. He or she often manages depression. This type of doctor can prescribe medicines. Do you need help finding a doctor? If so, read the tip on this page.

Psychiatrist. This is a type of doctor. He or she specializes in treating depression and prescribing medicine for it. This type of doctor can help if your depression is not well managed even though you've tried other treatments.

Psychologist. This is a health care professional who is not a medical doctor. He or she has a PhD degree. Psychologists have a lot of training in depression. They use testing and counseling to help treat depression. They cannot prescribe medicine.

Therapist, counselor or social worker. These professionals have master's degrees. You may see one for talk therapy. They can be a great source of help for depression.



How to Find a Primary Doctor

Do you have a primary doctor? If you don't have one, you should get one. Be sure to choose a doctor from your health plan. Need help finding one? Look at the back of your health plan card. Call the member services number. They can help you find one.

Safety note: Do you have medicines prescribed by more than one doctor? Be sure your primary doctor knows about all the medicines you take.

Be Good to Yourself

When you're depressed, it's so important to take care of yourself. Sometimes you might not feel like it. But, the effort will be worth it.

Follow your treatment plan closely. These tips can help, too:

1. Be with people. It's better for you than being alone.
2. Let family and friends help. Don't feel embarrassed. We all need help, sometimes. And, family and friends often want to show their love and support.
3. Take care of your body:
 - Exercise regularly. This can make more good chemicals in the brain. Want to start exercising? Talk to your doctor first
 - Eat good foods. This will give your body and mind vitamins and minerals. That will mean more energy.
 - Avoid alcohol and drugs. These may seem to help for a short time. But, they will only make your depression worse in the long run.
 - Pace yourself. Break jobs down into small steps. Set small goals you can reach.

Remember, it's OK if you can't do everything.



Sources

1. National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

Services and medical technologies referenced herein may not be covered under your plan or be available in all states or for all groups.